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<http://txforestservation.tamu.edu> or
<http://ticc.fws.gov>

Fast facts:

Ninety percent of all Texas wildfires are human-caused.

Escaped debris burning is the highest cause of wildfires in Texas.

Of the 254 Texas counties, 143 have implemented burn bans.

NEWS

from the Texas Forest Service

Date: August 16, 2000

FIRE RISK ALERT ISSUED

HUNTSVILLE – The fire risk assessment office of the Texas Forest Service in Huntsville has issued a fire behavior alert for Central, North Central, Northeast and Southeast Texas.

The continued drop in the moisture content of live vegetation is moving wildfire intensity and difficulty of control up to another level, according to the risk assessment alert. Firefighters are advised to recognize the potential for extreme fire behavior and plan their control operations accordingly. Citizens also are advised to limit, as much as absolutely possible, activities that could lead to an accidental start of a wildfire.

The bulk of the state is now in the extreme fire risk potential range, according to the August fire risk assessment. As of August 13, 179 of 254 Texas counties had drought indices indicating extreme fire danger. Another 64 counties were classified as having high fire danger risk. A total of 143 counties had bans on outdoor burning in place.

Extended dry conditions have combined to produce tinder dry vegetation that will ignite easily and burn with great intensity – with a high potential for large and destructive wildfires, says Tom Spencer, fire risk assessment coordinator with the Texas Forest Service in Huntsville.

According to Spencer, June 14 was the last date the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex received an inch of rain or better, and the story is close to the same for central and northeast Texas. Spencer noted that southeast Texas was in a rainfall deficit entering the summer and has yet to recover from it. Also, the state has been in a drought situation for the past two to three years, and there is little soil moisture available to compensate for this year's rainfall deficits.

"Everyone in the affected area needs to heed the deteriorating vegetation conditions caused by the extended dry weather," Spencer implored.

Careless debris burning, equipment use and improper disposal of smoking materials continue to cause wildfires, according to wildfire activity reports submitted to the Texas Forest Service. The state forestry and rural firefighting agency urges strict compliance with outdoor burning bans and voluntary postponement of all outdoor burning in counties without bans.

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Texas Forest Service fire prevention personnel suggest several fire safety precautions to prevent additional wildfires from occurring. Watch out for sparks when using welding equipment outdoors. Remove vegetation from the work area or wet down the area prior to beginning welding operations. Also, watch out for rocks and metal when bush hogging or mowing. Keep mufflers and spark arresters on agricultural equipment in proper working order. Avoid driving or parking vehicles in grassy areas where tall, dry grass comes into contact with hot pollution control equipment under your vehicle. Make sure that no metal hangs from your vehicle or trailer that could contact the road surface as you are driving down the highway. Properly dispose of smoking materials.

Additional information on fire safety, wildfire danger, county burn bans and other wildfire related subjects is available via the Internet on the Texas Interagency Coordination Center website, which is <http://ticc.fws.gov>.